No. 82

The
REDEMPTION
of
Marie Gordon
THE TRAGIC STORY OF
WRONGED WOMANHOOD
Price 10¢

"Indeed, I am coming back," he asserted stoutly. "No power on earth could keep me away from you, sweetheart. I'll be back in a week at the most. And you must promise to be true to me."

R. of M. G., No. 82.

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MR. SHIELDS, the lawyer, had just shown Marie Desmond, the document of the annulment of the marriage of Philip Gordon and Alice Procter. Marie had just finished reading when Phil drove up accompanied by Julia.

The movements of Phil and Julia seemed to indicate that this was indeed the case. He seized her by the arm as soon as they had alighted from the car and fairly dragged her after him in his haste.

His handsome features were white, and his eyes eagerly were directed to the window at which Marie still stood.

"What—what will I do? What will I say?" the latter panted, turning helplessly to Mr. Shields.

"Just keep cool and act natural," was the lawyer's advice. "I can tell the moment he enters this room just whether Julia has told him or not. Now, please, don't become excited or hysterical, my dear. Keep your feet on the ground."

A moment later the door flew open, and Philip Gordon rushed into the room, followed by Julia.

Marie stood awaiting him shivering as with an ague. She was too close to fainting to remember just what happened.

By the time her senses cleared, she found herself in Phil's arms and he was raining kisses on her forehead, cheeks and lips.

Mr. Shields made a motion to Julia, and they tactfully withdrew.

"You little tattler," the old lawyer accused as they walked arm in arm downstairs. "You told Phil everything."

"There was no way out of it," she defended. "I unwittingly said something about my sister, and he took it up at once. He practically forced a confession from

me."

"Well, it's alright, my dear girl," Mr. Shields smiled. "You relieved me of the task of opening his eyes."

In the meantime cries of joy filled the room they had just left.

"Marie—Marie, thank God I found you at last!" was Gordon's repeated exclamation. "Oh, if you only knew how you made me suffer!"

"This is the happiest day of my life," Marie managed to say between sobs. "I am sorry I had to make you suffer so, Phil, dear. But your suffering could not be compared with mine."

And then they sat down together with their arms about one another. They had much to discuss, and they had hardly begun when the door was pushed open.

Harry, leading his little sister by the hand, entered. Their childish eyes grew big with amazement when they beheld their father hugging Miss Desmond.

"Why, daddy——" the boy began, but he was swept off his feet that same instant by his happy father. Little Phyllis met the same reception.

Marie had not risen from her seat because her physical strength seemed gone momentarily.

"Children," the father said solemnly, "God has been very good to us. He brought back your mother. You learned to love her as Miss Desmond. You will love her all the more when I tell you that she is your mother. Go to her, both of you."

This explanation was quite enough for the children. Instinct had already told them that this Miss Desmond was more to them than a mere governess.

With jubilant cries the two children allowed themselves to be folded in their mother's arms. And what a love feast they had.

Phillip Gordon looked on with the tears streaming down his face. For nearly an hour the united parents talked in low, quivering voices, while Phyllis and Harry listened.

A timid knock on the door preceeded Julia's entrance.

"I am sorry to interrupt you," she apologized. "But I have to be leaving, and I want to say goodby to you."

"You are going to stay right here," Phil Gordon said as he rose to meet her. "Now don't object." He seized both of her hands and held them. "You see, I have lost a most efficient governess," he added with a twinkle in his eyes. "I must procure another. And besides, my wife needs a companion. This is your home from this day on, Julia."

The latter shook her head.

"But I can't leave my position without giving notice to the heads of the Charity League," she protested. "It is only fair that I should——"

"Leave that to me," Phil interrupted. "I happen to know the gentlemen quite well. I'll make such explanations as are necessary. Don't worry for a moment on that score. Where is Mr. Shields?" he inquired, with a glance at the half open door.

"He is waiting out in the hall to do what I came for—to say goodby," Julia responded.

With a bound Gordon was through the door and when he returned, the old lawyer was with him. He made no attempt to ward off the kiss which Marie pressed upon both of his cheeks. But he blushed furiousy.

"You dear, loyal friend," she murmured. "This would never have come to pass if it had not been for you."

Mr. Shields shook himself free. When he was able

to get his breath, he said:

"Little credit belongs to me, Mrs. Gordon. I am a great believer in destiny. Had you been guilty of wrong-doing, I would never have interested myself in your case. But you were innocent. Truth is bound to prevail in the end of all human events. Right must triumph always as it did to-day."

And how true it was.

Chapter 271

THE LIE

THE POSITION in which Hazel Wynne found herself can better be imagined than described. She had not only become the victim of a mock marriage, but she was left practically penniless in the bargain. When Robert Ames was called home by the telegram which informed him that his father lay at death's door, there had been little time for explanations.

And she had to be satisfied with the promise that he would return the next day.

Robert Ames, however, failed to come back. Neither had he sent any sort of a message. To say that poor Hazel was heartbroken would scarcely express it.

She took it for granted that her young husband had been weaned away from her by his rich relatives and friends.

"I might have expected it," she moaned as she paced the floor of the living room in her little cottage. "Oh, what a fool I was to marry him."

But that did not remove the deep yearning in her young heart. She loved Robert Ames with a strength nothing could kill. And she refused to give up all hope. She kept on making excuses for his failure to return.

Perhaps he had been taken ill. Perhaps he had met with an accident. Perhaps it was taking him all this while to reconcile his wealthy relatives to his marriage to her.

From the very beginning she had not trusted Robert's companion, Arthur Vernon. Her dislike for

the man was instinctive.

All she knew about him was that he occupied the position of social secretary with the Ames family.

She recalled now how he had watched Robert's every move, and how all the details in connection with her marriage had been left to him.

There was not the least question in her mind about him being Robert's loyal friend. In fact she had heard him make this assertion on several occasions.

But he must have been her friend also, for he had brought Robert to her home and introduced him. Vernon had also encouraged—or at least, tolerated their secret love affair.

These reflections, however, brought Hazel little comfort. She wanted the man to whom she had given her hand in marriage—her husband.

Little did she suspect that she had never been a wife. And so the por girl waited and waited. It was one afternoon that she noticed a green touring car stop in front of her cottage.

Without waiting to see the man who drove the car, alight, she took it for granted that Robert had returned at last.

She quickly changed her dress, and came to the door just as a vigorous knock sounded. With a smothered cry of joy she jerked the door open.

Poor Hazel! Her heart sank when she found herself standing face to face with the man whom she instinctively disliked.

Yet he was welcome, since he surely came to convey to her a message from her beloved husband.

She tried bravely to hide her bitter disappointment and her rising tears.

She extended her hand with a wan smile.

"At last—at last," she panted. "You come from

him? Tell me—tell me everything, is he well? Why do you hesitate?"

Her eagerness and anxiety was pitiful to behold. She stood before Arthur Vernon with her hands working nervously, her eyes seeking his imploringly.

The man whom she knew as her husband's friend walked past her and deposited a number of packages upon the table.

He seemed to be utterly indifferent to her mental agony.

"He is well enough at the present moment, my dear young woman," he said at last in his slow drawl, "but——"

"But what?" Hazel interrupted him eagerly.

The man paused and looked confused.

"You are hiding something from me," she wailed, walking close to him and putting her hand on his shoulder. "Can't you see that this awful suspense is driving me frantic? Please tell me the worst."

"Has your husband never told you anything of himself and his real position, Mrs. Ames?" he said at length.

Hazel looked startled. A frightful suspicion took possession of her.

"The only thing he told me was just before he went away," she faltered. "He spoke of some wrong he had done, without giving me a full explanation. He said that he was a criminal, and that he was not worthy of me."

"He told you that?" Vernon flared up.

"Yes," she replied, her voice breaking into a pitiful sob.

Arthur Vernon seemed to pause for words. Hazel little dreamed that she had made the treacherous task of the man before her far more easy.

She had opened the way for him to tell her the

blackest lie that ever passed human lips.

"I am very sorry that your husband did not tell you everything concerning this affair, in which he so foolishly allowed himself to become implicated," he began. "Now the unpleasant task has been left to me."

Hazel staggered slightly, but recovered her composure quickly and steeled herself to hear the worst.

"You must be a brave girl," the man continued, "for much depends upon yourself, whether or not your husband will be at liberty to visit you."

"You — you don't mean to say that he is in prison?" she gasped. She evidently misunderstood what he meant.

"Not at the present moment, Mrs. Ames. I will explain the entire situation to you, if you will promise me not to take it too much to heart," he said.

"I am listening — please do not omit anything," she replied scarcely above a whisper.

"To begin with," he said, "your husband was foolish enough to become a member of a secret order. This secret order was closely allied with an anarchistic society, which has its headquarters in Patterson, New Jersey.

"Their recent attack upon the ruler of a prominent foreign country has stirred the police into unusual activity. A number of arrests were made, and unfortunately your husband was among them.

"He would have been released at once if they had not found some incriminating literature in his pocket. How this literature came into his possession is a mystery to me.

"To save himself the unpleasant notoriety, which would be sure to follow his arrest, he gave a fictitious name, and we succeeded in getting him out on bond.

"When the day for the trial came, your husband

was missing. At this moment he is hiding in Philadelphia."

Hazel had listened to the fatal words of her husband's secretary with dilating eyes and trembling lips.

She fought bravely against the feeling of faintness, which threatened to overcome her.

Without paying the least attention to her, Arthur Vernon continued:

"He has sent me, his trusted friend, to bring this sad news to you, and also plead with you to forgive him. He knows that he has wronged you deeply and his heart is torn with remorse.

"Your husband has sworn to forsake all his former associates and leave this part of the country to begin a new life in the West. He is eagerly awaiting your answer and consent to accompany him.

"He expects to leave in a few days, because his presence might become known to the police. If he is re-arrested he will face a long penitentiary sentence."

Hazel sat there utterly crushed.

The blow had fallen at last, and all their happiness was swept away because the man whom she loved better than her own life was a criminal — a fugitive from justice.

It as more than she could bear With her hands pressed against her wildly throbing bosom she rose and walked over to the window.

Her course in the present crisis was clear. Her place was at the side of her husband. She would beg him on her knees to seek again the righteous path.

What did it matter if she had to leave the home of her childhood days, the place of happy recollections and pleasant memories.

Her husband had been good and kind to her, yes,

generosity itself. He needed her now and she would go to him.

"I—I must go to him at once," she said with her lovely face aglow. "You will take me to him, will you not?"

"Ah, you are a loyal wife, and your husband has cause, indeed, to be proud of you, Mrs. Ames," the lying scoundrel said, taking Hazel's hand into his.

"This is just what I expected from you, but we must go about this matter cautiously," he continued. "I am being rather closely watched by the police, because of my position and the fact that we have been seen together frequently.

"I would never do for me to accompany you to the city. It would arouse suspicion, and if your husband's hiding place becomes known to the police, everything will be lost."

"Then what is to be done?" she cried. "I have never been to Philadelphia but once in my life and I would not find him by myself."

The tears started to her eyes.

"Don't give up hope, my dear young woman," he said reassuringly. "If you will follow the instructions of your husband implicitly all will be well. He has thought of a scheme which will work very nicely, and I suggest that you follow out his plan."

Hazel had almost forgotten the fierce pain in her aching heart.

Her eyes fairly hung on the lips of the man whose loyalty to her husband she could not doubt.

There was but one thing in her active mind now, and that was the joy of seeing her own husband again.

"I am willing, yes, anxious to follow any plan he has suggested, Mr. Vernon," she said eagerly. "Please be thoroughly explicit in your instructions."

Again Arthur Vernon smiled with satisfaction. He was getting along famously.

His task was far more easy than he had expected it to be.

"Your husband has a particular friend whom he has taken into his confidence," the traitor said. "To him you are to trust yourself. He will arrive in a few days and take charge of everything.

"He will help you dispose of your property here and then take you to your husband. To make matters look less suspicious he is to pass as your cousin."

"I am perfectly satisfied with those arrangements," Hazel replied, when the man had finished giving her what she thought to be her husband's instructions.

"It will not be an easy matter to tear myself away from all this. I have loved this beautiful spot dearly, but it will be less hard to relinquish when I think that I will receive my own husband in exchange."

This ended the matter evidently.

Arthur Vernon gathered up his hat and coat and walked carelessly toward the door as if he was ready to take his departure.

This was only a sham, however, he was but half through with his well laid, diabolical plot.

Suddenly he turned and faced Hazel.

"An excellent idea occurred to me just now, Mrs. Ames," he ejaculated. "It would serve to throw the secret police off the track entirely. It would be a splendid coup."

"I am curious to hear it," Hazel said innocently.

"In the first place, the police may have followed me down here and are perhaps this very moment shadowing my every move. This naturally will put you under suspicion.

"Now this idea of mine is that you leave a letter

when you leave this house, addressed to your husband. The contents of this letter I shall dictate to you."

Hazel hurriedly brought paper and ink, and was apparently anxious to comply with the idea of her husband's secretary.

She sat down with pen in hand, when suddenly a peculiar feeling of fear and apprehension overcame her.

"Don't listen to this man! He means to destroy you," a voice seemed to whisper into her ears.

The man observed her hesitancy quickly and hastened to dispel her doubts.

"You surely are not afraid to trust to my good judgment in this matter," he said with a most engaging smile. "You know that I would not do anything to imperil the happiness of my friend and his beautiful young wife."

"What am I to write?" Hazel asked, her face flushing.

"The idea is to creat the impression among the police that you have left your husband, since he has neglected you for this length of time. That you are going directly to New York to some relatives. This is only a ruse to throw the police off the track."

When Hazel still hesitated Arthur Vernon showed his displeasure by a frown.

"Of course, if you do not trust me, I shall have to wash my hands of the the entire affair and let things take their course," he said, his voice rising. He assumed an indignant, injured air.

He put on his coat and prepared to leave, but Hazel stopped him.

The cunning scoundrel knew how to make this unsophisticated and trusting young woman submissive.

His little acting brought about the desired result

and he lit a cigar and walked up and down the room for some moments before he started to dictate the letter.

At last he began, and Hazel wrote the following words:

Dear Robert:

Almost five months have passed since you left me. You have not kept your promise to return to me; nor have you deemed it necessary to make an excuse for your continued absence in writing.

You know how dearly I have loved you, and that I gave you everything your heart craved for as far as it was in my power. The little money you left me was hardly sufficient to keep me alive.

I can construe your willful absence only in one way—that you desire to rid yourself of me. Since you have absolutely ceased to consider the ties which bind you to your wife, I also have taken a step, which will assure me a home and some happiness at least.

The man who so liberally came to my rescue when I was near the point of starvation, has asked me to go with him. He is a man of wealth who means to provide for me.

There is nothing to prevent me now, especially since I love him with all my heart——

Hazel had so far written every word the man dictated to her.

Her very heart and soul rebelled against commit-

ting these abominable lies to that paper.

"I—I can not write this," she faltered. "I really can't. It is not true."

"Of course, it is not true, you foolish child," Arthur Vernon replied with a smile. "Don't you understand? This letter will never be read by your husband. It is merely to confuse the detective who may come down here to make inquiries about you."

"All right, then, but please be brief," she quivered. "Well, now, what was that last sentence? Oh, yes——"

I love him with all my heart, and I sincerely hope to find the complete happiness with him, which was denied me at your side.

As far as my future is concerned, you need not feel apprehensive. I shall be in good hands.

If remorse should prompt you to again seek me, you will find that a useless task. I could not again trust myself to a man who regards his marriage ties so lightly.

I thank you for the few happy hours you gave me, and may your future be a tranquil one.

Hazel

After the letter was signed, Hazel rose with the perspiration standing in great big beads upon her fair brow.

It would have been utterly impossible to explain the feeling of loathing and self-condemnation, which had taken possession of her.

What if her beloved husband were to read that frightful letter?

Yet she sought refuge behind the thought that

even this letter was to help her to reach him safely. besides, would it not help his cause also?

She would liked to have gone at once with Arthur Vernon to the great city.

She longed to be with her husband with all her heart and soul, but his friend was very much opposed to this idea.

And he had a mighty good reason for opposing such a plan.

She breathed a sigh of relief when he left the house. He had promised that her husband's trusted friend would call on her two days later.

He had also instructed her that she was to allow him to make all arrangements without question and opposition on her part.

Hazel sat by the window and watched the large green touring car disappear in the gathering twilight with a strange misgiving in her heart.

The man who occupied the comfortable rear seat was evidently much pleased with himself.

Chapter 272

"I AM YOUR WIFE NOW!"

CHRISTMAS was being celebrated at the Ames mansion with the usual ceremony and splendor. In the spacious hall stood a huge tree, magnificently decorated and covered with hundreds of lights. It seemed that the spirit of merriment was missing, and a general feeling of depression prevailed among those present.

Everyone missed the genial smile and kind words of welcome of Charles Ames.

It was he who had first inaugurated the custom of inviting every employe of his bank and their wives and children to the Ames mansion on Christmas day.

It had been his hand that distributed the costly presents with a lavish hand.

It always gave him extreme pleasure to assume the role of Santa Claus to amuse the children.

Charles Ames had been a much beloved old man. It seemed that his absence was destined to mar the usual joyful spirit of the occasion.

There was neither the singing of Christmas carols, nor the sounds of unrestrained laughter.

After a splendid dinner which was served in the grand dining salon, the guests entered the hall, led by Robert Ames. He still walked a trifle unsteady and with the aid of a cane.

A table laden with gifts for everyone present, stood next to the one supporting the tree in the center of the hall.

The task of distributing these presents fell to the

young master of the house.

He had a pleasant word and a warm handshake for everyone. At his side stood Alice, attired in a costly black lace gown.

She looked superb. Her wonderful eyes followed every move of her beloved husband.

She was now the mistress of the magnificent mansion, which position had been relinquished to her gracefully by Robert's mother.

Robert Ames made every effort to dispel the gloom and the feeling of sadness which hung over the entire assembly.

His efforts were rewarded, for soon the room was filled with songs and happy laughter.

Alice was at the piano and she accompanied the songs of the children, her eyes glowing with enthusiasm and delight.

The evening proved to be an enjoyable one after all, and the guests did not leave until it was almost twelve o'clock.

Robert Ames stood at the door to bid them all good-night.

The hall resounded with the many expressions of good will which came from sincere and grateful hearts, as they passed out.

Alice's face was flushed with pride. They had called her Mrs. Ames, and were not those good wishes also meant for her as well as for her husband?

After the last guest had departed, her eyes followed the retreating figure of Robert Ames, who sought the seclusion of the library.

There was wistfulness and sadness in them.

All evening she had hoped and looked for a ray of warmth from his eyes; but it seemed that it was utterly impossible for her to penetrate his unyielding cold-

ness and extreme reserve in manner.

While all of his words addressed to her had been spoken in a pleasant and courteous manner, his eyes constantly warned her—kept her at bay.

The servants had begun to extinguish the lights, but Alice still lingered in the reception hall.

Her eyes were glued upon the door of the library, and the expression of her face was one of curious expectancy.

Suddenly the door opened and Robert reappeared. He aproached her with a quick step, and put out his hand impulsively.

"I forgot to thank you for your splendid arrangement of this affair to-night," he said with a peculiar twinkle in his eyes, "and now will you come with me to the library? I shall not detain you long."

Without a word Alice followed him. The hot blood was rushing to her face.

Could it be possible that his heart had been softaned—that he meant to take her to his bosom and forget the past?

She entered the library reluctantly. Robert took hold of her hand and drew her after him.

He stopped in front of his desk and pointed to a life-size oil painting of his father, which had been hung directly above it.

It was a beautiful piece of work.

The kind face of the old man seemed to look down upon them as they stood there side by side, with a smile of approval upon his lips.

The painting had been framed in a magnificent gold frame, and in one corner at the bottom was inserted a small white card. It bore the inscription:

"A Merry Christmas—from Alice to Robert."

"I realy don't know what to say or how to thank

you, Alice," he said, his voice trembling with emotion. "Nothing in all the world could have pleased me more."

He was unconscious that his hand still held that of his wife in a warm clasp.

Nor did he notice that her lovely face had gone suddenly strangely white, and that her splendid figure swayed perceptibly.

His first intimation that she had fallen to the floor in a swoon came to him when he felt her hand slipping away from his grasp.

"Why, what is the matter, Alice?" he cried in alarm.

He bent over and lifted her inert figure into his arms, then laid it gently on the divan.

He quickly brought the smelling salts and bathed her temples with brandy.

The magic touch of his fingers brought the color back to her face and slowly she opened her eyes.

Alice looked about in a dazed sort of way, then swiftly the recollection of everything came back to her with a rush.

Her dark eyes wandered up to the picture above the desk, while she rose to her feet.

"Robert," she said with infinite tenderness in her voice, "your father died happy because the fondest dream of his life was realized when you made me your wife. You promised to love and protect me. Are you going to keep that promise?"

He did not answer. His eyes were still riveted upon the face on the wall which looked down upon them so benignly.

"May I not claim the rights and privileges of a wife, Robert?"

He would gladly have spoken, but his heart was too full for utterance. It was torn with conflicting emo-

tions.

He had no desire to wantonly wound the woman who had become his wife under such extra-ordinary circumstances.

"Would to God I could give you what you ask, Alice," he said at last. The words broke from his lips with a groan.

"And why not, Robert?" she persisted gently.

"Because——"

"Because of that other woman," she broke in with some vehemence. "You need not look startled. I know everything."

He looked at her with an expression of surprise.

"Then if you know everything, you must realize how utterly impossible it is for me to do as you ask," he replied in an even tone. "Perhaps it is well that my father will never know what an impossible task he imposed upon me, when he insisted upon the marriage.

"You and I must be frank with each other. There must be no misunderstanding nor false hopes. If I have led you to believe that there is even the remotest possibility of you winning my love, I am sorry.

"What you say is true. Father died happy because he inflicted upon those whom he loved best a wound that will never heal. Yet I will do what I have promised as far as it lies in my power. I will honor and protect you, Alice, but love—never."

There were some moments of intense silence. Alice's breath came fast.

An expression came into her eyes which Robert had never seen there before. They looked positively dangerous in their fierce blackness.

"But you did love me once, Robert," she panted, coming a step closer to him, "and I would make you love me again if it were not for that other woman who stole

your heart from me."

Robert Ames shrugged his square shoulders.

"No doubt you are referring to our little affair while we were at Venice," he declared. "Well, I admit I was pretty hard hit for a time. But I got over it quickly. I never had any serious intentions of marrying my mother's companion."

"I am your wife now," Alice snapped. "Am I not?"

"You are," he admitted ruefully. "But I'd give most anything I own to know how you won my dad over. You must have used some uncommon methods to make him insist on his deathbed that I marry you."

Alice looked away. Somehow she could not stand the steady gaze of her husband.

All she knew that she loved him desperately, and she was determined not to give him up.

She might have told him the horrible truth. She might have admitted that she had been his father's mistress and that as a reward she was to become Mrs. Robert Ames.

But instead she decided to play upon his spirit of chivalry and his manhood. She must play the generous one. She said, with a sidelong glance:

"Then I must take it for granted that you intend to go back to Westchester and — and that woman. Is that true?"

"Yes, it is true," young Ames responded. "A most grievous wrong has been done here. I must right it at once. But the thing you must not forget is that I love her dearly. I would not give her up for my hope of Heaven. Please let this be understood."

She measured him with a long glance.

"Do you — do you really love her that much, dear?"

"More than my life, Alice."

She tottered for a moment, then sank limply into a chair. Her wonderful self-control seemed about to forsake her.

"It is not fair!" she almost screamed, and then uttered a deliberate falsehood. "I have been bargained for without my knowledge. Your father had no right to insist that I marry you. Can't you see what a terrible position you and your father placed me in? Must I suffer alone because of his dying request?"

He approached her quickly with an expression of genuine compassion in his eyes, and laying his hand gently upon her dark face he said:

"I am sorry for you, Alice. I would willingly give ten years of my life to be able to undo this injustice which has been done you. Though I were to remain at your side as your husband, my thoughts and spirit would be constantly with the woman I love."

Alice rose from her seat and faced him with an air of resignation, but it was feigned resignation.

"You are right," she said, in a scarcely audible voice, "your place is at her side, because you love her. She must be a good and pure woman to be worthy of your love and unwavering devotion.

"I will even try to love her myself because of my overwhelming love for you.

"Only promise me one thing, Robert," and here she broke down completely, "that when your soul is filled with happiness and joy, you will not entirely forget the lonely woman who must hide her misery and breaking heart forever from the world. Who must meet your mother day after day with a smile on her face and live a lie because of you."

She moved toward the door with an unsteady step.

Robert Ames reached out his hand to stay her,

but before he could prevent it she had opened the door and hurried away.

"Alice—Alice," he called after her, but she did not stop until she had reached the seclusion of her own room.

A complete change had been wrought in the heart of Robert Ames during the developments of the last hour.

He felt guilty of having done her a terrible wrong. The uncomfortable feeling of remorse and self-condemnation took possession of him.

He realized that he had inflicted a frightful wound in her heart, and it was not in his power to alleviate her suffering, much less to heal that wound.

Alice was like a changed woman since that night.

Never before had she appeared so lovable as she did now in her sweet humility and absolute resignation to her fate.

It seemed to Robert that she bowed to the inevitable with an air of meekness and complete submission.

He tried very hard to be kind to her, but on several occasions when he was about to say a few kind words she fled from him.

He saw her in a different light now, and found her desirable and tempting.

He looked into the future with the new-born hope that everything would adjust itself, that he would find a way to bring Hazel home and first of all right the wrong he had done her.

Robert could scarcely await the time when he would see her again.

The doctor had told him that he would be able to make the trip to Westchester within a week, providing

no unforeseen complications arose.

He was at this moment waiting impatiently for his confidential friend and secretary.

He was overdue, but for some reason failed to put in his appearance.

Robert Ames was not aware of the fact that Arthur Vernon had returned from Westchester and was this very instant closeted with Alice in a secret conference.

Neither did he dream that the story which he was telling her was vastly different than the one concocted for his ears.

To Alice it was glorious news to hear that her hated rival would be effectually removed from her path forever.

This left the field open to her.

She felt confident that her husband would slowly turn to her, and was following a plan that had been very cunningly conceived.

Robert was seated in the library looking over his mail, when his secretary at last made his appearance.

He rose with an exclamation of welcome and held out his hand.

"Well, old man, thank God, you have come at last."

He stopped suddenly when he noticed the serious expression on the face of his secretary.

"You—you have not come to bring me bad news," he faltered. "Speak at once, Arthur! What has happened?"

Arthur Vernon took a chair with cool deliberation. The fact that his young master was burning with anxiety and impatience did not seem to hurry him in the least.

"Don't be alarmed, my dear boy," he said at

length in his slow drawl. "Your wife is well, and I dare say more radiantly beautiful than ever, but her conduct seemed a trifle out of the ordinary."

"Why—what do you mean? What has she done, Arthur?"

"Well, to begin with, she did not seem so well pleased as a young wife ought to be at the prospect of seeing her husband again after such a long absence," the secretary said rather carelessly.

"Of course, that might have been due to the fact that I was the bearer of the good news. You know, Hazel was always somewhat prejudiced against me. She treated me very cool, and one thing struck me peculiar, she seemed confused when I came.

"Another thing I found the room filled with the lingering odor of a good cigar. This led me to believe that she had a male visitor shortly before I came. And as I looked her over closely, I discovered that she had been drinking."

Arthur Vernon watched the face of his young master keenly as he uttered this deliberate falsehood.

He was sowing the seed of suspicion, and saw that it was taking root.

"Good God!" Robert Ames gasped, "you — you don't mean to insinuate that Hazel forgot herself to the extent of consorting with other men?"

The other shrugged his shoulders.

"I am sorry to bring you such unpleasant news, my dear boy," he said without moving an eyelash. "You don't seem inclined to believe me, I know. However, I can furnish absolute proof that the country maiden is not worthy of you."

"What? Furnish proof?" the younger man cried. "How?"

Very slowly Arthur Vernon drew a sealed envelope from his pocket.

"Here is something the girl insisted upon me taking to you, Robert. She said it was a letter she had intended to mail. She laughed as she mentioned the fact that my carrying it home with me would save the price of a postage stamp.

"I feel sure this letter contains something that will corroborate everything I told you. You must pull yourself together, my boy. If the message from Hazel comes as a shock, you must bear it like a man."

With trembling hands Robert Ames reached for the envelope. It nearly dropped to the floor as he broke the seal.

The neatly folded sheet of paper he drew out contained the message Hazel had written at Vernon's dictation.

At the first few words young Ames seemed to turn to stone. But he did not stop, but read the letter to the bitter end.

The agonized groan which escaped his lips was only a mild expression of her frightful mental anguish.

At last he crushed the letter between his fingers, and the self-possession which he had struggled so magnificently to retain, left him completely.

He wept as thought his heart was breaking.

"Hazel—Hazel, how could you?" he sobbed.

This was Vernon's opportunity to sneak from the room unobserved. And he did it with all possible haste.

It was some minutes before Robert Ames' turbulent mind had been conquered by frantic efforts to think clearly, and to look the situation squarely in the face.

Slowly, by degrees, he regained the mastery over his mental faculties.

He still believed that his Hazel was true to him

and loved him in spite of the damning evidence against her.

As he reflected over the many little incidents which his secretary and confidential friend had related to him, he was at once able to see that perhaps he himself was to blame.

The words of Arthur Vernon came back to him with great force.

It seemed now, as he thought over it all, that this was only what he could have expected. It was months since he last saw her.

In spite of it all Robert Ames could not bring himself to believe that Hazel had deliberately given herself to any man.

This, to his mind, seemed utterly impossible.

To him she was the very soul of purity and truth. Those scarlet lips of hers could not utter an untruth, and those pansy eyes never gazed with love and desire upon any other man.

It was all very strange, and Robert tried to find a reason for Hazel's seeming dishonorable action.

This, however, was a problem he could not solve.

Once or twice his heart became filled with a feeling of intense jealousy.

He hated her and tried to banish every thought of her from his mind, because she was not worthy of his tears.

But her lovely face, her soft pleading eyes were ever before him. The sound of her melodious voice was still in his ears, and dispelled the feeling of bitter resentment in his heart.

Other women might in the spirit of revenge or utter loneliness be willing to listen to the voice of the tempter, but his Hazel—never.

"I can't believe it—I won't believe it," he kept on

saying to himself as he paced the floor, his eyes staring unseeingly. "And yet, how could she write me such a letter. How could she?"

What poor Robert Ames suffered that moment could not be expressed in mere words. His whole life was blasted.

A dry sob broke from his lips. But it brought no relief. Nor did the others that followed.

Chapter 273

TRYING TO FORGET

ALICE paced the floor of her luxurious boudoir like a caged tigress. The fire of impatience and intense longing burned in her black eyes. She stopped and gazed out of the window. The hoarse tooting of the many automobiles which crowded fashionable Broad Street, grated unpleasantly on her sensitive ears.

This was the third day since Robert Ames had left the mansion.

She had expected him back long before this, but for some reason which she could not fathom, he failed to return.

Could it be possible that those well-laid plans had miscarried? Or, had Arthur Vernon played her false?

There was a dangerous gleam in her eyes, which made it apparent that she was not a woman to be trifled with.

Her beautiful, dark head was raised defiantly as if she meant to challenge fate. Alice was possessed of an indomitable spirit.

She was a woman who, if she had once set her heart upon winning the love of a certain man, would move heaven and earth to accomplish it.

She stopped suddenly as if something had startled her.

The thought entered her mind that Robert Ames might have gone on a long trip to forget his heartaches, and without seeing her.

She scarcely dared to think of it, and yet—why this prolonged absence?

Again she walked back to the window and gazed toward the east. It was from this direction that he would come.

Her eyes became fastened upon a taxicab as it made its way through a veritable maze of vehicles of all descriptions.

Her heart gave a sudden leap as the taxi stopped in front of the Ames mansion.

Her eyes fairly blazed with triumph as she saw the slightly stooped figure of Robert Ames, alight and walk up the broad stone steps with a slow tread.

Her pale cheeks were flushed with pleasant anticipation.

The man whom she loved with all the intensity of her passionate soul had come home—and to her.

She wanted to run down to meet him, to kiss his lips, and tell him how happy she was that he had returned.

Alice had learned to practice patience and self-control, especially where her husband was concerned.

Her advances had met with a cold stare and a hard voice upon several occasions. It was a bitter lesson to learn.

She scarcely hoped to see him before dinner, and her maid brought her the information that Mr. Ames was closeted with his secretary, Arthur Vernon.

She was satisfied to some degree. With a sigh she picked up a book and tried to read.

Her heart suddenly stopped beating when she heard a timid knock on the door.

"Come in," she said, rising to her feet.

The door opened, and there stood Robert Ames.

Continued in next number

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